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The U.S. government may have located the wreckage of a Navy airplane that crashed in Antarctica in 1946, killing three crew members - including the brother of a Mundelein woman.

Using ice-penetrating radar, scientists have found something that could be the doomed George One, a seaplane that went down during a Cold War expedition on the frozen continent, Antarctic expert Jerry Mullins said Thursday.

The unidentified object is buried deep under ice, possibly more than 100 feet down, he said.

"I do have what I believe could be an aircraft," said Mullins, polar programs manager for the U.S. Geological Survey, a federal scientific agency that collects information about the world's natural resources. "There needs to be further work to confirm that before anyone starts digging."

Mullins' remarks - made on the 58th anniversary of the crash - thrilled Mundelein resident Betty Spencer, whose brother, Wendell K. Hendersin, was among those killed.

"I'm elated," said Spencer, 78. "I just hope that I live that long (to see) it recovered. I'll just have to take care of myself better."

The developments also delighted U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, who has urged the Pentagon to search for the George One and its ill-fated crew.

"We made real progress in finding these lost Americans," said Kirk, a Highland Park Republican. "I think it's a testament to American men and women in uniform that we will go to any continent, any environment, to bring you home."

Hendersin was a Wisconsin native who received his basic training at what is now the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near North Chicago. He served during World War II and survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

He died Dec. 30, 1946, when the George One grazed a ridge and exploded over Thurston Island, just off the continent's west coast. Two other crewmen - flight engineer Frederick W. Williams of Tennessee and navigator Maxwell A. Lopez of Rhode Island - also died, while six men survived. The survivors buried the victims near the wreckage.

Hendersin was in Antarctica as part of Operation Highjump, the largest expedition ever undertaken there. The effort gave the U.S. military experience in polar conditions at the start of the Cold War. Crews also thoroughly mapped the continent for the first time.

Spencer and her family long have campaigned for a recovery mission, but their pleas were rejected for years.

According to the Navy, Hendersin's body was not recovered when he died because, at that time, the military usually did not retrieve remains of soldiers who died overseas. Additionally, because the men died in a peacetime accident and not in combat, the crash didn't qualify for the federal funding that pays for recovery efforts.

Questions also were raised about whether the bodies could be recovered safely.

Spencer's efforts gained momentum in 2003, however, after a Daily Herald story about the crash prompted assistance from Kirk. That August, the Navy said it would study whether to recover the George One and the remains.

Then, last month, an airborne mission involving NASA scientists and the government of Chile, which regularly does scientific research in that region of Antarctica, made four passes over Thurston Island with a scanning laser and radar equipment, Mullins said.

The scans picked up an object under the ice that could be the George One. No one has come up with an alternative explanation for the signals, which still need to be thoroughly studied, Mullins said.

Mullins said he believes the George One and the crew members buried on Thurston Island can be positively located and recovered. Additional radar scans would be needed as well as an on-the-ground drilling effort, he said.

Such a mission could take two years or more, Mullins said. He's encouraged by a similar effort this past August in Greenland that recovered the remains of Navy airmen lost in a 1962 plane crash.

"It's the sort of thing that seems to grab everybody's attention," Mullins said of the George One mystery. "I think it's the human aspect of the story."

Kirk, himself a Naval Reserve officer, said he hopes the mission moves forward. He credited Spencer and her family for persevering in their campaign to recover the George One.

"Sometimes (government) moves slowly, but we are a democracy and eventually your voice gets heard," he said.